(a) whether teledensity in rural areas in increasing in proportion to growth of teledensity in urban areas;

(b) what is the extent of cross subsidy involved in implementing rural telephony systems, charging urban consumers more; and

(c) whether the share of Universal Service Obligation Fund is fully utilized in expanding rural telephony in India?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) and (b) The growth of teledensity in rural areas has been slower as compared to that in the urban areas. The rural telephony is implemented through the mechanism of Universal Service Obligation Fund. In addition, BSNL has also been reimbursed certain amount of licence fee and spectrum charge each year during 2001-02 to 2004-05.

(c) A sum of Rs. 1841.50 crore, allocated for rural telephony for Universal Service Obligation Fund during 2002-03 to 2004-05 has been fully utilized.

Appointment of software professionals

3113. SHRI T.T.V. DHINAKARAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that software professionals at the level of Programme assistants/Programmers have not been recruited for many years now;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) whether Government would appoint fresh computer professionals in National Informatics Centre rather than engaging private agencies?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) and (b) During 2001-02, 283 Programme Assistants were recruited in National Informatics Centre. An advertisement for recruitment for 30 Scientific/Technical Assistants exclusively for North-Eastern District Centre has been released. Approval for filling up of the remaining 209 vacancies due to resignation, retirement and absconding is under considertaion.

(c) Manpower required for strategic and specialized areas such as Cyber Security, Open Source Solutions, Digital Signatures, Network Operations and control etc. will be recruited by National Informatics Centre (NIC). The jobs of software coding, handholding, data entry, scanning and indexing, rollout, etc. are being outsourced.

Computerisation of post offices

3114. SHRI SUDARSHAN AKARAPU: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the work relating to computerisation of all postal activites and connectivity of post offices across the country has been undertaken by Government;

(b) if so, the time-frame by when the work would be completed; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) Yes, Sir. The work relating to computerization and connectivity of post offices across the country has been initiated by the Department of Posts.

(b) The work relating to computerization and connectivity of all Head Post Offices and large Sub Post Offices across the country is expected to be completed by the end of the current Tenth Five Year Plan period.

(c) Does not arise in view of (b) above.

Outstanding amount due to public sectors

3115. SHRI C. PERUMAL: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a huge amount due to public sector telephone companies from various agencies;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps taken to recover the amount?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) and (b) Total outstanding dues to Bharat